
Canevin, J.F.R.

Catholic Growth in the United
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Catholic Growth

in the United States

By
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CATHOLIC GROWTH

A Historical and Statistical Examination into the
Progress and Population of the Catholic Church
in the United States from 1780 to 1920

[COMPILED FROM OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT SOURCES]

FOREWORD

THERE have been so many conflicting statements about the leakage and losses of the Catholic Church in this country, that a careful inquiry into the historical facts and statistical proofs, on which such statements are based ought to be made in the interest of truth and for the vindication of the zealous priests and devoted Catholic people who have preceded us in the way of faith, laying in poverty and sacrifice, the foundations of the Catholic Church in this country.

Can it be that these dark and gloomy recitals of leakage and losses have been made without definite knowledge or thorough investigation of the facts? Some of the writers and lecturers have placed the losses of immigrants and their descendants so far above what the highest possible natural increase of Catholics by birth and the total number of foreign-born persons in the country would warrant, that they may be set aside as exaggerated and unreliable calculations. It is evident, from all statistics at hand, that in the early missionary period there were not many Catholics lost to the faith, for the reason that there were not many Catholics in the country to lose; and that, in the most trying periods, the Catholic movement was steadily moving onward by fidelity in faith and conversions, rather than backward by leakage.

History shows a decided gain to the Church in the early days, apart from immigration. John Gilmary Shea, His Eminence Cardinal Gibbons, Most Rev. John Ireland, Rt. Rev. Thomas O'Gorman, and others who studied the question closely, failed to find any convincing

evidence of the appalling losses that our pessimists deplore. A thorough examination of the baptismal registers of the first half of the nineteenth century would show a large number of converts received into the Church,—a number much larger perhaps in proportion to the Catholic population than the number of converts at the present day. But it is not proposed to deal, in this pamphlet, with gains to the Church by conversions, but with the losses from direct apostasy and other causes. That there have been losses, all must admit; for men have fallen from truth and grace in every period of the history of Christianity; but has it been proven that the defections from the Church in the United States have been so extensive as to be reckoned by millions?

When merely nominal Catholics, or members of condemned secret societies, skeptics, infidels and atheists, who were baptized Catholics, immigrate and continue what they have been in their own country, it should not be counted as loss to us. The apostasy was not here. They were estranged from the Church before they came. Neither can our pastors and people be charged with remissness in guarding the flock, or in seeking out and saving those lost, strayed, or stolen from the fold. The condition of the Church in the United States today, is the best refutation of such a charge.

Therefore, in settling the question of increase and progress we must bear in mind the vast numbers of baptized but uninstructed and unbelieving men and women who land upon our shores from countries in which the Catholic religion is supposed to prevail. Let us always ask: in what relation to the Catholic Church did the immigrants stand in their own country? What percentage of them were really Catholics, as we count Catholics, before they left their native land? Was it 60 per cent, or even less? Why then should it be said that the other 40 or 50 per cent have been lost to the faith after they landed on our shores?

It must also be kept in mind that not all the Catholic immigrants remain with us. Government statistics show that large numbers of immigrants die within ten years after their arrival and that, in each decade, for the past fifty years the number of foreigners who left the country was 40 per cent or over of the number that arrived in that decade. This shows that many persons are counted as immigrants more than once, because they come to our shores and return to their native land several times.

To estimate correctly the number of foreign-born Catholics that must be accounted for, we must calculate, not by the number of Catholic immigrants within a given period, but by the number who survived and were living in this country at the end of that period, according to the census reports showing the number of foreign-born persons

living in the United States at the end of each decade. Not the immigrants who come and leave, but the immigrants who remain in the United States increase our foreign-born population.

Losses Exaggerated

At the Declaration of Independence in 1776, it is estimated that there were 25,000 Catholics within the territory of the United States. The population was then about 3,000,000. In 1790, when Bishop Carroll was consecrated, he placed the number of Catholics at 30,000 in a population of about 4,000,000.

The settlers of the original thirteen colonies were nearly all Protestants, Maryland being the only colony that had any considerable number of Catholics, and it was only after the Revolution that the widely scattered families and little groups of the faithful, outside a few centres where chapels had been established, were gathered into missions and visited, sometimes at long intervals, by the pioneer missionaries of those days.

Statistics as to the number and nationality of immigrants coming to the United States from 1790 to 1820 are not as definite as the statistics after that period, but there seems to be an agreement of opinion among the best authorities, that the total number did not exceed 250,000 at the highest. The dominant elements were English, Scotch, Irish and German. The early German immigrants were largely Protestants, and the same may be said of the early Irish immigrants who came chiefly from the north of Ireland. Like the Germans, many of them settled on farms. This is evident from the number of Lutheran, Presbyterian and other Protestant congregations in the country districts throughout New England and the Middle and Southern States which have been in existence a hundred years or more.

To compare with them, there are few Catholic parishes which go back farther than seventy or eighty years, and even at the present time there are long settled and well-populated counties in some states in which there is not a single Catholic congregation. With the exception of a few of our older settlements, the memory of men and women still living goes back to the time when but one or two Catholic families resided in cities, towns and country districts which now have large Catholic parishes.

The history of all our dioceses shows that the Catholic population and Catholic immigration were increasing very slowly until after 1830. From 1840 to 1860 Catholics were coming in such large numbers from Ireland and from Germany that bigotry was aroused, violent anti-Catholic movements were planned and put in operation, and an aggressive and unscrupulous proselytism was carried on in different parts of the

United States. Against these and other antagonists in American political and social life, the Church has had an incessant struggle, in which there have been losses, as there ever have been and ever will be in her warfare with the world until the end of time.

When we are told that the losses have been enormous, that they have exceeded by millions the gains through conversions, let us pause to consider the evidence on which such statements rest.

When Bishop England wrote in 1836 that "within the last fifty years (1786-1836), there must have been a loss of three and a quarter millions of Catholics," that, "in that period there had come into the United States eight millions of immigrants;" he certainly had not examined into the statistics of immigration, or he made an enormous error in his calculations. He may have meant 800,000 instead of 8,000,000. His estimate of loss would then have been 325,000. The most reliable data places the total immigration into the United States from 1786 to 1836 at less than 600,000. Another estimate, which has been often quoted, was published in 1852 by a representative of a European university. It declares that there were two millions of apostates, mainly Irish, in 1850. The official census of 1850 places the total foreign-born population, all nationalities, in the United States, at 2,244,602.

The total Irish immigration from 1820 to 1850 as shown by official records was 1,038,824, plus 100,000, the estimated Irish immigration from 1776 to 1820, making the total Irish immigration from 1776 to 1850, 1,138,824. In other words, the writer referred to would have us believe that all the Irish immigrants up to 1850 and many of their descendants had apostatized.

Another assertion which passes in histories and encyclopedias as authority on losses to the Church, is a report which appeared in the *New York Tribune*, July 30, 1851, of a "carefully prepared discourse," evidently for political purposes, of Hon. W. E. Robinson, M. C., in which he states that "in 1850 there were 3,000,000 Irish born persons in the United States." The total foreign-born population of all nationalities, was in 1850, according to the United States census, 2,244,602 and the total Irish born immigration did not exceed 1,138,824.

Irish born population in 1850 could not exceed 1,000,000; since many of the Irish immigrants, 1,138,824, must have died or emigrated.

The Lucerne Cahensly Memorial of 1891 states "that Catholic immigrants and their descendants in the United States should number twenty-six millions." "There has been a loss of sixteen millions." In June, 1910, the Honorable Mr. Cahensly presented another Memorial to the Holy Father in which he asserts that the "Memorial" of 1891 "showed that the Catholic Church in the United States had already lost more than ten million souls." Other computations have followed

the foregoing and similar exaggerated statements and have reached the same unreliable conclusions.

Statistics

Let us now proceed to study the problem of our loss and gain as told by the official statistics of the United States census and the Commission of Immigration.

TABLE A

Year	Total Population	Per Cent of Increase by Births and Im- migration	Per Cent of In- crease by Births Only	Period	Immi- gration	Increase of Popu- lation by Immi- gration	Foreign- Born Popu- lation	Year
1790	3,929,214							
1820	9,638,453	145.18	140.09	1790-1820	250,000	200,000	200,000	1820
1830	12,866,020	33.55	33.24	1821-1830	143,439	28,960	228,960	1830
1840	17,069,453	32.67	29.55	1831-1840	599,125	400,416	629,376	1840
1850	23,191,876	35.86	26.40	1841-1850	1,713,251	1,615,226	2,244,602	1850
1860	31,438,321	35.58	27.41	1851-1860	2,511,060	1,894,095	4,138,697	1860
1870	38,558,371	26.63	22.08	1861-1870	2,377,279	1,428,532	5,567,229	1870
1880	50,155,783	30.00	27.11	1871-1880	2,812,191	1,112,714	6,679,943	1880
1890	62,622,250	25.50	19.73	1881-1890	5,246,613	2,569,604	9,249,547	1890
1900	75,994,575	20.70	19.61	1891-1900	3,687,564	1,091,729	10,341,276	1900
1910	91,962,267	21.02	17.07	1901-1910	8,796,286	3,002,307	13,345,545	1910
1920	105,710,620	14.09	14.0	1910-1920	5,735,811	367,209	13,712,754	1920

RULES OF COMPUTATION

First. To ascertain the real increase of the Catholic population in any period, we must find two factors; the rate of natural increase (births over deaths), and the increase by immigration.

Second. The rate of natural increase for the Catholic population has been determined by a comparison of the excess of baptisms over deaths in various growing dioceses in this and other countries. It ranges in each decade from 35 per cent under the most favorable conditions, down to 20 per cent, and is modified in each period by the increase or decline of Catholic immigration. The natural increase is higher in new countries where there is a large and equal proportion of young men and women than in old states; and larger where men are settling on farms, or establishing homes for themselves in towns, than where they are engaged on public works or living in the crowded quarters of large cities.

Third. The increase by immigration in any period is the difference between the foreign-born population at the beginning and at the end of the period.

Fourth. The Catholic increase by immigration is found for any period by adding to the Catholic population the same percentage of the total increase in the foreign-born population as will repre-

sent the proportion of Catholics in the countries from which the immigrants came.

These factors of calculation can be determined from the reports of the United States census, the Commission of Immigration, and the percentage of Catholics in the countries from which the immigrants come.

1790-1820

The census reports (Table A, page 6), give the rate of increase of the population of the United States from 1790 to 1820 at about 145 per cent. As the immigration was small we may begin by taking 145 per cent, an increase of about 35 per cent in each decade, as the basis of Catholic increase.

To the estimate of Bishop Carroll, 30,000, which is considered low, let us add 10,000, making the Catholic population of the United States in 1790, 40,000. If 40,000 be increased 145 per cent we have 98,000 Catholics in 1820. According to Archbishop Marechal, between 1800 and 1820, Florida, Louisiana, and the West, with a Catholic population of 75,000, had been added to the territory of the United States. The Catholic population was then, 98,000 plus 75,000, and to these figures we add 70,000 as the Catholic portion of the foreign-born population, giving us a total population and a new basis of calculation, in 1820, of 243,000.

1820-1830

The rate of natural increase, births over deaths, for the total population for this period is 33.55 per cent. (Table A, page 6.) This warrants 34 per cent as the rate of natural increase in the Catholic population. The foreign-born population is increased but little in this decade. The Catholic portion of the increase by immigration is estimated at about 12,000. Catholic immigrants did not come in any considerable numbers until after 1830.

243,000 Catholic population in 1820.

82,620 Natural increase, 34 per cent.

12,000 41 per cent of increase in foreign-born population.

337,620 Catholic population in 1830.

1830-1840

The process of calculation is the same as in the preceding period. Immigration is much larger, and the Catholic percentage much greater.

337,620 Catholic population in 1830.

111,414 Natural increase, 33 per cent.

212,220 53 per cent of increase in foreign-born population.

661,254 Catholic population in 1840.

John Gilmary Shea places the Catholic population for 1830 at 361,000, and for 1840 at 1,000,000. That his estimate for 1840 is far too high can be seen by a glance at the census reports. The rate of increase for the whole population of the country including the increase by immigration was 32.67 per cent. His estimate of the Catholic population for 1830, 361,000, plus 33 per cent equals 480,130. Even if all the increase by immigration for the period were again added, he would have, not 1,000,000, but 880,546. If he added the true Catholic percentage (53 per cent) of the increase of 400,416 in the foreign-born population, he would have 480,130, plus 212,220, which would equal 692,350.

1840-1850

In this period the Catholic percentage of the foreign-born population is larger than in any other period. While greater numbers of Catholic immigrants came in later periods, greater numbers of non-Catholics also came, and relatively, greater numbers of Catholics returned to their native countries. From 1840 to 1860, Ireland was sending over 45 per cent of all the immigrants, and over 80 per cent of the Irish immigrants were Catholics. A large proportion of the German immigrants of this period were Catholics. In 1910 Ireland was sending only about 4 per cent and Germany only about 8 per cent of the total immigration.

From this period our calculations can be made with an additional degree of accuracy, on account of the more exact system of taking the United States census, and especially on account of its recording the countries from which the foreign-born population came, and the number of persons from each country.

661,254 Catholic population in 1840.

218,213 Natural increase, 33 per cent.

888,374 55 per cent of increase in foreign-born population.

1,767,841 Catholic population in 1850.

1850-1860

1,767,841 Catholic population in 1850.

583,387 Natural increase, 33 per cent.

1,041,752 55 per cent of increase in foreign-born population.

3,392,980 Catholic population in 1860.

1860-1870

3,392,980 Catholic population in 1860.

780,385 Natural increase, 23 per cent.

728,501 51 per cent of increase in foreign-born population.

4,901,866 Catholic population in 1870.

The ravages of the Civil War with its breaking up of families, large number killed, increased emigration from the country, are evident in the above statistics of low birth rate and small immigration during the decade, 1860-1870.

1870-1880

4,901,866 Catholic population in 1870.
1,568,597 Natural increase, 32 per cent.
556,357 50 per cent of increase in foreign-born population.

7,026,820 Catholic population in 1880.

1880-1890

7,026,820 Catholic population in 1880.
2,108,046 Natural increase, 30 per cent.
1,284,802 50 per cent of increase in foreign-born population.

10,419,668 Catholic population in 1890.

1890-1900

10,419,668 Catholic population in 1890.
2,604,917 Natural increase, 25 per cent.
513,112 47 per cent of increase in foreign-born population.

13,537,697 Catholic population in 1900.

In this decade numbers of Hebrews and other non-Catholics immigrated. Many Catholics emigrated, and the Catholic per cent of increase by immigration was lower than at any time since 1830.

1900-1910

13,537,697 Catholic population in 1900.
3,384,424 Natural increase, 25 per cent.
1,561,199 52 per cent of increase in foreign-born population.

18,483,320 Catholic population in 1910.

1910-1920

18,483,320 Catholic population in 1910.
4,066,330 Natural increase, 22 per cent.
183,604 50 per cent of increase in foreign-born population.

22,733,254 Catholic population in 1920.

The steady and rapid fall in the rate of natural increase of the population of the United States during the past fifty years, (Table A, page 6), shows that race suicide, divorce, decrease of marriages, and

late marriages are doing deadly work outside the Catholic body. Only immigration, which, in each decade since 1860, has supplied from 13 to 15 per cent of the total population, and the high Catholic birth rate, have kept our natural increase above the low level of dwindling France in the last thirty years. During that period, Catholics have not altogether escaped the un-Christian influences of their environment, especially in the decrease of marriages and custom of late marriages. Their increase has been retarded also by the small proportion of women among Catholic immigrants, but despite all these hindrances there has been a high excess of births over deaths in the Catholic population.

A Discrepancy Explained

The foregoing calculations place the whole number of Catholics to be accounted for at the end of 1920 at 22,733,254, which is 4,625,640 more than 18,107,614, the figures given for the Catholic population of the United States by the Catholic Directory (1922). This discrepancy does not mean that 4,625,640 Catholics are to be counted as lost to the Church. In the 22,733,254 are contained about 3,337,000 Italians, including their children, and 1,500,000 more made up of the late immigrants from France, Belgium, Cuba, Mexico, Portugal and their descendants, of whom not 50 per cent would be included in the usual parish census of practicing and contributing Catholics from which the statistics of the Directory are compiled. Yet nearly all of this eclipsed tenth are as Catholic today as the same class of people in the countries of their ancestors.

Besides the merely nominal Catholics that are passed over in the parish census, there is a very large number of real Catholic immigrants, "foreigners" as they are called, scattered all over the United States, yearning for the Bread of Life, but having no priest, or none whom they can understand, to minister to them. If the Directory included all these, the discrepancy would be greatly reduced, if it did not entirely disappear.

Again, the 22,733,254 omits no element that goes to increase the Catholic population, except the increase by conversions. The Catholics in the foreign-born population are estimated at the highest percentage that the census and immigration reports will allow. The Catholic natural increase is fixed in each decade much higher than the average natural increase of the whole population of the country.

Any estimate of Catholic increase might be considerably reduced by making allowance for two facts. First, in the great Italian and Slav immigration of former years, far the greater number were men who brought with them neither wives nor children, the women immi-

grants being less than 33 per cent; and, secondly, the exceedingly high mortality among the children of these immigrants, during the last thirty years.

A comparison between the calculation of the Catholic population as worked out in the preceding pages and the estimate reached by John Gilmary Shea cannot fail to be of interest.

He calculated the number of Catholic immigrants and allowed for each decade a natural increase of one-third over the total number of Catholics with which the decade began. He apparently made no allowance for the variations in natural increase as shown by the census.

		Shea's Estimate
1790.....	40,000	30,000
1820.....	243,000	244,500
1830.....	337,620	361,000
1840.....	661,254	1,000,000
1850.....	1,767,841	1,726,470
1860.....	3,392,980	3,000,000
1870.....	4,901,866	4,685,000
1880.....	7,026,820	7,067,000
1890.....	10,419,668	10,627,000
1900.....	13,537,697	
1910.....	18,483,320	
1920.....	22,733,254	

Millions Accounted For

If 22,733,254 in 1920 will account for the total Catholic population with accessions by its natural increase and immense immigration since 1800, some one may ask, what has become of the millions of Catholic immigrants? As already stated, immigrants die from decade to decade, and the statistics of immigration show that at least 40 per cent of immigrants do not remain in this country. The immigration to the United States from 1880 to 1890 was 5,246,613, which added to the foreign-born population of 6,679,493, as given by the census of 1880, would give a foreign-born population of 11,926,106 in 1890—but death and emigration of foreign-born persons from this country had reduced the 11,926,106 to 9,249,547 in 1890.

The total immigration between 1890 and 1900 was, owing to industrial conditions in this country, much smaller than in the preceding decade, being 3,687,564, which added to the foreign-born population of 9,249,547 in 1890 would increase it to 12,937,111 in 1900. The census of 1900 accounts for a total foreign-born population of 10,341,276. In other words, 2,595,835 of the foreign-born population left the country

or died between 1890 and 1900, and the increase of population by immigration was only 1,091,729 instead of 3,687,564. The greatest immigration in the history of the country came between 1900 and 1910, when 8,796,286 immigrants landed. Added to the foreign-born population of 10,341,276 here in 1900, we would have 19,137,562. But the decennial census of 1910 records a total foreign-born population of 13,345,545. According to these statistics 5,793,979 foreign-born persons died or left the country and the gain to our population was not 8,796,286, but only 3,002,307.

From 1910 to 1920, 5,735,811 immigrants came into the United States. The foreign-born population in 1910 was 13,345,545; add to this 5,735,811 and we would have a foreign-born population of 19,081,356 in 1920. The world war, political revolutions in Europe and epidemics at home, reduced by emigration and death, the 19,081,356 to 13,712,754 a gain of only 367,209. More than 50 per cent of those who left the United States between 1910 and 1920 went to countries in which Catholics are in the majority. For the United States it was a decade of large emigration, high mortality and reduced rate of natural increase of population.

Statistics show that immigration from Italy, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Croatia, Lithuania, has been less permanent than that which came from other countries, so that while Catholic immigration between 1890 and 1920 has averaged over 50 per cent of the whole, the percentage of Catholics in the total foreign-born population of the United States at the end of each decade has been from 45 to 50 per cent of the whole. The number of foreign-born persons from each country, is given in the United States census of the foreign-born population, and the number of Catholics can be found by the percentage of Catholics in the population of the country from which the immigrants came, by tables similar to the table on the following page, one of which was made out for each decade since 1830 in preparing this statement.

Some Causes of Leakage

Among the principal causes of loss to the Church in the United States, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century, we may mention the inadequate supply of priests and churches, the want of Catholic schools, the scandals and schisms arising from trusteeism, mixed marriage, intemperance and the degraded poverty of which it was the cause, the social exclusion, and sometimes the social and political persecution of Catholics; the proselytism of orphans and of men and women of weak faith.

Today our Catholic people must withstand the strong secular and materialistic spirit of the age, a spirit which places materialistic

TABLE B

Foreign-Born White Population of the United States in 1900 and 1910

Countries	Per Cent. Catholics	Foreign Born 1900	Catholics 1900	Foreign Born 1910	Catholics 1910
England.....	.056	842,078	46,556	875,400	49,022
Wales.....	.056	63,682	5,246	82,600	4,625
Scotland.....	.13	233,977	30,417	263,400	34,190
Ireland.....	.75	1,618,567	1,213,923	1,351,400	1,013,550
Germany.....	.37	2,669,990	986,786	2,242,999	829,909
Canada and Newfoundland					
English.....	.42	785,958	330,102	798,667	335,449
French.....	.90	395,297	355,768	399,333	359,400
Sweden.....	.0002	573,040	114	665,500	133
Norway.....	.0005	336,985	168	403,500	201
Denmark.....	.0014	154,284	215	181,500	254
Russia.....	.15	335,036	50,254	956,333	143,449
Lithuania.....	.95	89,060	84,607	164,766	156,528
Italy.....	.95	484,207	459,997	1,341,800	1,274,710
Poland.....	.95	383,510	364,335	838,120	796,214
Austria.....	.78	433,240	337,927	1,064,482	830,295
France.....	.90	104,341	93,907	117,100	105,390
Switzerland.....	.40	115,851	46,340	124,800	49,920
Holland.....	.35	105,049	36,872	120,000	42,120
Mexico.....	.90	103,410	93,069	218,800	196,920
Cuba and West Indies.....	.80	25,586	20,468	51,228	40,984
Hungary.....	.78	145,802	113,725	468,500	365,430
Belgium.....	.95	29,804	28,314	35,000	33,250
Portugal.....	.95	30,618	29,088	60,786	57,747
Spain.....	.95	7,072	6,719	37,344	35,477
South America.....	.90	4,761	4,285	12,889	11,601
Finland.....	.0004	62,638	25	129,600	51
Greece.....	.005	8,564	42	101,100	505
Pacific Islands.....	.40	2,049	819	1,807	722
Syria.....	.50	20,000	10,000	46,754	23,377
Atlantic Islands.....	.75	9,784	7,338	15,500	11,670
All other countries.....	.30	12,577	3,773	172,515	51,754
		10,213,817*	4,761,199	13,343,583†	6,854,838

*Does not include Chinese, 89,863; Japanese and other Asiatics, 37,596.

†Does not include Chinese, 70,944; Japanese, 71,722; other Asiatics, 2,936.

progress, profits in trade, and the accumulation of wealth and means of living in luxury and ostentatious display, as the great end of human existence. The soul and the claims of religion are disregarded in public education, and Catholic faith and morality must constantly resist the weakening influence of the baneful atmosphere of godlessness that pervades society. Against these forces of evil, pastors must contend with all the powers and agencies of good that God has given to His priests and people; powers sufficient, if rightly used, to check all the leakage for which we shall be held responsible, and to build up and increase still more the Church of Christ. Our greatest efforts should be devoted to strengthen the weakest parts of the Catholic body in this

country. The one great source of loss is mixed marriages. To this all the other causes that tend to weaken and destroy faith seem to converge and contribute. Mixed marriages would not be as frequent as they are, if it were not for the facility with which dispensations are obtained, and the want of vigilance, earnestness, and uniformity of practice, in striving to prevent the too often unhallowed and disastrous unions.

Another cause of leakage has been the absence of a real missionary spirit and training in the education of our Catholic people. Zeal and sacrifice for souls were not a special part of their education as they should have been. The result is that immigrants and their children, in many places, have been neglected because there was no Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, or society of lay catechists, or other apostolate, to seek them out and bring them to the Church, encourage them by kindness, instruct them in their religion, and minister to them freely until they have learned to contribute in their turn to the support of religion.

With the increasing number of priests, educated and ordained for our dioceses, our home mission organizations, and our parochial schools rapidly growing and improving, the future of our Catholic people presents no problem that cannot be solved, with the exception of the descendants of a few races, which, as has been explained, send many immigrants to this country who are Catholics in name only.

The Belgian and Latin race immigrants, as a body, are lamentably ignorant of the truths of religion and utterly devoid of the zeal and loyalty to the Church which is characteristic of the humble immigrants from other lands, who welcome the coming of a priest, travel long distances to fulfill their religious duties, and contribute generously from their scanty wages to erect and support churches and schools. The Italians, in particular, from their poverty, lack of religious education, indifference and apathy towards the Church are a favorable field for proselytizers who by presents, favors, imitations of Italian customs and traditions, entertainments, clubs, and other devices, endeavor to attract them to their schools and missions and win them over to Protestantism. Had the sons of Italy and other Latin nations the robust faith of the Irish and German immigrants of seventy and eighty years ago, or the militant Christianity of their fellow Catholic immigrants from Central Europe, the story of our gain and progress in recent years would be vastly different; but there are hopeful signs of change, especially in the younger Italians. Many of them, instructed in Catholic schools and organized into parishes, are learning to respect the clergy as Catholic Americans respect their priests, and to contribute to the support of their churches; by doing so they will surely grow in faith and love of religion.

If the conversions recorded in the baptismal registers of the United States since 1790 could be set against the losses of the church in the same period, on which side would the balance fall?

We do not know how many have been gained to the Church in the last one hundred years by conversion, but the gain has been great, greater than in any country in Europe. Some parishes are largely composed of converts and the descendants of converts. I am loath to believe that our losses have been greater than our gains, especially when we consider that while less than one hundred years ago Catholics were one in fifty of the population, they are now one in five.

The words of John Gilmary Shea are as true of the Catholic Church in the United States in 1920 as when he wrote them forty years ago. "A Church which has so developed in fifty years (1830-1880) that from half a million of believers it numbers six millions," and in forty years more (1880-1920), twenty-three millions, "is a fact that cannot be overlooked." Increasing more rapidly than other portions of the population by its birth rate, as well as by its immigration, its influence is steadily advancing while polemical attacks, mob violence, hostile legislation, and the trickery of shrewd and bigoted politicians, seem, by successive failures, to give it new strength as it continues its work of teaching and saving all nations."

The Church in what is now the United States began the nineteenth century with about fifty priests, fifty churches and a Catholic white population of not more than 100,000. Catholics were then but emerging from the penal days of the eighteenth century; they possessed but the most meager civic rights, with but a few men of learning, wealth, or position, among their members; they had to struggle on through difficulties and opposition which only men of strong hearts and strong faith could overcome. When we study the conditions of Catholics at the end of the eighteenth century, and consider what Catholics did in this country during the nineteenth century, we must be convinced that they fought no losing battle. They could not have been weak in their faith, their bishops and priests could not have been wanting in zeal and self-sacrificing labor for souls, and accomplish what has been accomplished in one hundred years.

No body of Catholics in history approached to anything like the marvelous progress which this poverty-stricken, hard-working, unlettered, persecuted, Catholic minority in the United States made between 1800 and 1900. Churches, schools, colleges and universities have sprung up all over the land; institutions of mercy and charity are there to testify to the love of these people for their fellow-man. There could not have been defections and apostasies of millions of



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time a material and earthly progress of Catholic virility that have not been sur- any age. The stalwart faith and loyalty this country today, their unity and devo- States, prove that, amid the conflicts of the nineteenth century, faith and fidelity supported and sanctified the lives and work of those who preceded us, and ought to determine us not to accept without proof the statements of prejudiced minds that the Church has failed in this republic; that our losses have been greater than our gains, especially when we consider that our mission to those outside the fold and gains by conversion have been as great, if not greater, during the last one hundred years than in any country of Europe.

Acknowledgment

In preparing the historical part of this study of Loss and Gain, much valuable information was obtained from articles in the American Catholic Quarterly Review, Vol. I, page 148, (1876), and Vol. IX, page 471, (1884), by John Gilmary Shea; also from the History of the Catholic Church in the United States (1895) by Rt. Rev. Thomas O'Gorman, D.D., especially from page 488 to page 500; also from Wm. J. Bromwell's and Prescott F. Hall's Histories of Immigration; Immigration by H. Pratt Fairchild; Government Statistics of Immigration and Emigration; Catholic Encyclopedia.

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